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ABSTRACT

Day care providers can meet the needs of infants by providing security and affection through bodily contact, approving and admiring glances, and gentle and firm vocal responses. The caregiver should also be able to employ developmental theory as a way toward providing appropriate stimuli and responses to infants at various stages of development. Developmental theory is especially relevant to the caregiver's handling of infant misbehaviors, responding to the moods of babies, and providing appropriate learning experiences. Caregivers have to become creative arrangers of learning experiences with people and objects. Toys and interactions should give feedback to the baby. By improving their noticing skills, providers can encourage infants' attempts at problem solving and can forestall discouragement, boredom or frustration. In addition to knowledge of developmental level, caregivers should have knowledge of infants' individual strengths. Fewer emotional upsets will result when providers set goals and tasks that each baby can succeed at with a bit of trying. (At the conclusion of this presentation, six guidelines for day care providers are offered.) (Author/RH)

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MEETING THE NEEDS OF INFANTS[1]

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What are the most important ingredients that family day care providers will need in order to meet the needs of infants they serve? First and foremost, babies need dominion over a warm, loving responsive body. Babies need a caregiver's body for comfort, for play, for feeding, for companionship, for reassurance. Caregivers need to think carefully about how comfortable they feel about their bodies serving as a security base, a place of tenderness and refuge for babies. Some babies need much carrying. Indeed, they sometimes seem to be habitually draped on a shoulder as one goes about daily household tasks. How the adult nurtures these needs for body contact will make an important difference in the emotional well-being of infants. Cuddling, nuzzling and lap snuggling give babies the courage to go forth and tackle some of the more difficult early adventures of household learning such as to eat solids with a spoon, learning to explore while creeping or toddling and yet learning to comply with household rules about what is safe or dangerous to do. Caring and confidence in baby's learning ability are gifts of the sensitive caregiver. Courage-to-try, compliance, and affection are the treasures infants give to adults in return.

Infants need admiring glances, looks of pleasure, eyes with calmness that signal all is well or will soon be well. Baby laboriously hoists herself upright, holding on to a sturdy chair. She is not too certain how to get

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down again. The way up was adventure enough. Her eyes turn to the caregiver. "Yes, you got up all by yourself. You pulled up to standing by the chair so well, I am proud of you." This and much more is the message the provider's eyes and words send forth. Reassured, the baby senses that her wobbly stance, her brave tries, are O.K. Even if she plops down to the floor, all will be well. The provider's eyes have lovingly validated her venturing, validated the essential goodness of her strivings and activities. Babies who feel that they are esentially good can grow up to be good human beings. They have fortunately not caught the sad message sent all too often by some adults that babies are "bad", or will "get into trouble" or are expected to be a burden.

Voice tones are a powerful tool in meeting the needs of infants. Sharp, suspicious and impatient tones can shrivel courage. Cold annoyed tones can lead to a feeling "I am bad. I am unlovable". Seated on a potty, a toddler heard interesting noises of blocks tumbling down. Since the noises came from an adjoining room to the bathroom, the toddler shuffled, with panties down around her ankles, toward the door in order to investigate. "Sit down! Didn't I tell you to sit there till you make!" ordered the caregiver sharply. We need to listen to our voice tones. Good feelings about the self are nourished with gentle voices that can be firm yet caring when rules may have to be restated and explained.

To meet the needs of babies we need to become familiar with developmental tasks and gains for each period of infant development. If we know that most babies have moved from earlier whole-hand raking swipes and scissor-like attempts to pick up items then we can plan experiences to boost more precise thumb-and-forefinger coordinations for a baby nearing the end of the first year of life. Safe, nutritious finger foods, such as cooked carrot slices, bits of

grated apple or cooked peas on a tray will help boost pincer-prehension skills and at the same time boost the self-confidence of the baby about being able to feed himself.

Piagetian developmental stages should be recognized by a caregiver (Honig, 1974). If we know that an 8 to 12 month old is in that stage of sensorimotor development where actions-as-means have begun to be separated from actions-as-goals, then we can more ably provide toys-on-a-string games or pull-the-diaper-to-get-the-toy-on-top games (Honig & Lally, 1981).

Eriksonian stages of development help us to realize that a two year old may not know how to express a separate sense of self except by saying "No" sometimes to adult requests. Skills are in short supply. A sense of will in struggling to become a separate individual with legitimate wants and wishes is strong in toddlers. For example, a provider announces that lunch is ready, and expects the toddler to move toward the eating area. Toddler may run off in the other direction with that dauntless "No-no" that asserts his will to be separate and to be different. Knowing the importance of the Eriksonian "autonomy" stage, the provider sniffs the air appreciatively and remarks "Mmmm. That hamburger sure smells <u>good</u>!" Toddler gallops past the adult on his eager way to eat lunch.

<u>How</u> we handle what may appear to be misbehaviors often depends crucially on our knowledge and expectations of when developmental tasks occur. A caregiver may well understand that 12-18 months is a developmental prime time for "trial-and-error" behaviors. Then toddler attempts to pull a toilet paper roll to see what is at the end or toddler experiments to see where toys fall as they are dropped or flung different distances from a high-chair or play pen can be seen not as predominant desires to annoy an adult, but as expressions of passionate

curiosity to find out "what will happen if". A provider with foresight baby-proofs an environment where toddlers in this stage will be sure to try out new actions to see just what might happen. Often, when seemingly "naughty", the toddler is just as surprised as the adult at the results of her actions. She drops a potato on the floor to see it bounce as balls do. And the potato may split open and not bounce at all. Providing safe opportunities for such experimentations with toys and with items the adult approves of can boost children's thinking skills and attempts to make sense of the physical world. The physics of liquids and solids is learned early on in the nursery years. How do different toys behave in the bath tub? What happens when you squeeze or throw down hard or bouncy or soft items? How come milk pours out when a container is turned upside down, but oatmeal sticks to the bowl? Early scientific puzzles are explored energentically by toddlers.

Dealing effectively with baby moods also depends on developmental knowledge. Ministering to a crying baby becomes easier if caregivers remember that a healthy young baby cries because he or she needs something. Feeding, diaper changes, being talked to and amused, having a toy to swipe at or bang with, being put into a new position with further opportunities to explore with eyes and hands - these are some of the needs that prompt the cry. Research shows that the more promptly the cry is responded to in the first months of life, the more appropriately the baby's needs are met, then the less a baby uses crying as a communication mode by the last months of the first year. Babies will use other signals, such as coos and calls and tugs and arm movements. They have learned to trust their caregivers. If they cried, someone cared and came and helped. Such babies have been found to be more compliant with adult

requests to toddlers. Meeting babies' needs helps them learn to meet adult needs. Giving to babies supports their long-time learning to become more generous in meeting adult requirements in living together.

Knowledge of developmental norms helps a provider to become more aware of how hard or how easy a task may be for each baby. A baby who has trouble banging two blocks together in pat-a-cake play will find a shape-sorter box or a tower-building task impossibly difficult to handle. A baby who can put several blocks in a large cup without taking each one out right after putting it in may well be ready for a pegboard game where she can put several pegs in a peg-board.

Hand-release skills are still shaky toward the end of the first year. A 10 month old baby may put a hand holding a block down into a plastic margarine container for his caregiver on request. But that same fist may come right back up still clutching the block. Defiance? No! Hand-release skills still need time and practice to improve. Knowledge of developmental norms helps us to change our attitudes in relating to the troubles babies have while learning the tasks we set for them. Control of the anal sphincter muscles may still be poor. Such a baby will still have many toileting accidents. Toilet-training should wait until voluntary-control skill over those muscles is in better supply. Babies are not out to misbehave or aggravate caregivers. They are indeed struggling to gain mastery over their bodies and understanding of the world they live in. A secure, loving relationship with a calm, unharried, understanding provider is the best prescription for the development of the baby's ability to feel that he is successful.

The learning careers of infants are launched in an aura of certainty of loving care and with the provision of opportunities to practice emerging

skills. The emotionally anxious baby must give too much energy to the struggle to feel loved. There may not be enough energy left over for optimal learning and the growth of mastery.

The learning tasks of infants in the first years of life are awesome. Infants must learn that objects out of sight still exist and can be searched for. Pee-a-boo games often initiate this search for the hidden object-the beloved face of the caregiver. Babies must also learn that sometimes they cannot carry out their well-practiced actions such as banging or waving or mouthing a toy without first using another action as a means to obtain the toy. First baby may have to stretch or lean around a provider's body to retrieve a toy that has been moved a bit away. Baby may have to pull a string to get a toy within her reach for play. Later, babies learn to search for the causal mechanisms that make toys work. They need toys that require a button to press, a handle to turn, or a key to wind to make the toy go. These learnings of causal relationships, of means to goals, require that caregivers provide a rich assortment of toys and interactions that give feedback to the baby. If baby acts, then the toy or the person reacts. To meet the needs of infants, caregivers have to become creative arrangers of learning experiences with people and with objects (Willis & Ricciuti, 1975).

Interaction games, such as cooing back and forth with baby, or playing "so big" foster mutual satisfaction and learning the rules of games and of taking turns. Giving a baby floor freedom provides the space and the furniture obstacles that will facilitate navigational skills and the ability to make sense of spatial arrangements. Safe opportunities for tumbling, sliding, climbing and running will help babies develop competence and grace in their large muscle skills.

Babies are sensuous creatures. They need to taste, stroke, explore with lips and mouth and hands. Water play and self-feeding experiences as well as soft blankets and cuddly animals will satisfy some of these sensory needs.

Babies need encouragement to become problem solvers. When providers sharpen their noticing skills they can boost the baby's problem solving efforts such as when they provide a steadying hand on a pegboard as baby pushes a peg onto a board that is sliding around too much to allow success. Good noticing gives the adult clues as to whether to make a game a bit easier or a bit more challenging. Such "matchmaking" skills are a precious adult resource. They ensure that developmental tasks will not be too easy or too frustrating but mostly stimulating to baby's curiosity and need to gain competence.

Noticing skills help providers forestall boredom or frustration. A clear understanding of the components of tasks and the capabilities of each baby aids a provider in appreciating the earliest signs of success at a new and relatively difficult task. An infant at 11 months may not be able to bring a block up to, then over and down onto another block to build a two block tower. Yet the good noticer is aware when baby clearly approaches one block toward another in attempting this task. Appreciating such beginnings allows the provider to enjoy the first fruits of baby's struggles to master a new task. Adults need to take joy in infants' beginnings. For some babies, discouragement comes easily unless the provider encourages the earliest steps in new learnings. Caregiver approval and delight gives the baby confidence to continue to progress.

Matchmaking skills are the truly creative contribution of providers. Suppose a toddler needs practice in sorting objects (classifying skills) or in lining items up in order (seriating skills). Sorting and matching laundry items or stacking kitchen pots and pans or putting utensils into piles of similar sized spoons are good household activities that promote the intellectual development of toddlers.

Knowledge of the individual strengths and developmental level of each baby is important. Chronological age does not always give good clues. Baby ability clues in the wise caregiver. Then the challenge presented to each baby can be adjusted to match the individual readiness level. Fewer tantrums or sullen angers or unhappiness will result as providers set goals and tasks that each baby can succeed at with a bit of trying rather than an overload of frustration.

Let us sum up then, a provider's six secrets for supplying a nourishing environment in which the very young child can flourish.

1. Embed curriculum in daily routines whenever possible. Diapering and feeding and household chores give good opportunities for lots of talking and learning experiences.

2. Loving and learning are intertwined in infancy. A caring relationship is necessary to permit an infant to learn. Be sensitive to infant signals. Meet needs promptly. Exploration and competence flow from secure attachment.

3. Matchmaking skills boost the baby's chances for success, since tasks are geared to his or her developmental abilities.

4. Learning involves a struggle. Arrange opportunities sometimes for a baby to learn on her own from encounters with materials at an appropriately challenging level.

Toddlers see-saw between cooperation and a fierce desire to try to do things on their own and their own way. Be judicious in offering help. Empathize with the toddler's struggle between still needing intimate closeness and yet wanting to be big and bold and independent.

5. "Dance the developmental ladder." If a task is too hard, find a way to dance down and ease the baby's way. If the baby is bored, dance up the ladder. Challenge him with new problems he can work hard to solve.

6. Learn from each encounter. A provider who watches babys' interactions with people and with events can sharpen noticing skills. Positive engagements with babies increase our abilities to become ever more harmonious and effective infant caregivers.

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